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Teachers vs Educators: Which Are You?

By [Starr Sackstein](#) on May 5, 2016 5:00 AM

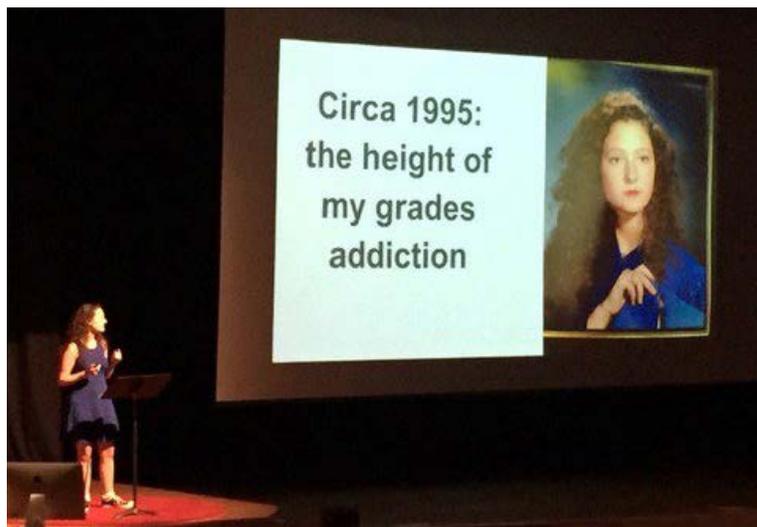
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How often do we meet people who leave a lasting impression? How many of those people were educators who spent time helping to sculpt us into the people we are today?

This past weekend I had the experience of a lifetime when I presented my first

TedxTalk at a [TedxYouth](#) event at Burlington High School in Massachusetts.

All of the speakers were very inspiring, but I'd say that the student speakers stole the show. Timmy Sullivan, a senior at Burlington High School, closed the event with a compelling talk about the difference between teachers and educators, which got me thinking (and I'm sure I'm not the only person who was wondering which **he'd classify me** as).

First he sought to define what a teacher is using the dictionary. Courtesy of Webster:

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A teacher is "one that **teaches**; *especially* : one whose occupation is to instruct" versus an educator, who is "one skilled in teaching : **teacher**." I agree with Timmy that these two definitions don't really distinguish between the two well enough.

For me, like Timmy, a teacher is someone who shows up for a teaching job every day. He or she knows the content and likely teaching like a job. Whereas an educator is one of those people who goes farther than what is expected. It's the teacher who makes relationships with students more important than the content, but because of those relationships, the content comes alive.

Teaching isn't just a job to an educator, **it's a calling**. It's passion and commitment and a desire to amplify the voices and dreams of the many children whose lives touch them as much as the educator touches theirs.

Timmy spent time going through his schooling career and came up with a short list and tried to figure out what they had in common. Being much farther away from my formative education, the fact that some educators still remain inside my consciousness to this day as I continue to grow in this profession as I try to emulate the impact they made on me supports their classification as such.

So for this **Teacher Appreciation Week**, I'd like to give a little shout out to a few educators who have helped shape me as the person, writer, and educator I hope to become.

- **Margery Kashman** - MK taught 12th grade honors English. She read my personal writing and encouraged me to keep at it, as a matter fact, she still does now. Being in her class made me love reading and we shared many probing conversations at lunch about *Grendel*. When it came time for me to do my observations as I was becoming a teacher, MK was the teacher I wanted to observe most. She invited me back with open arms.
- **Mr. Johannan**- Calculus teacher who made math an experience. His classes were fun, challenging and engaging. I enjoyed math that year.
- **Mr. Williams** - High School music teacher. He knew I was shy and lacked confidence as a singer, but always offered me opportunities to try. Performing in his groups taught me discipline and made me feel a part of something that really mattered. The music bled from him and his excitement for the subject filled the hallways with song.
- **Ted Chereskin** - an art teacher who let me follow my whims, no matter how crazy they were. He allowed me to test my curiosity, even if it meant me casting my entire body in plaster or using pencil shavings as filler in a collage. No suggestion I made was out of bounds. I took risks in his class and he supported everyone.
- **Mr. Scheiner** - my 4th grade teacher who I accidentally called "daddy" once. He didn't shame me, he was flattered. It was in his class that I learned to love reading not fear it. His presence was a commanding one and despite the way he looked, his demeanor was so gentle and warm. I was going through a hard time in my life at that time and school became a place I wanted to come to hide away.
- **Dr. Maxwell** - 11th grade honors English. She challenged us all to consider literature in a way that made me think. We put novels on trial. Ours was *Deliverance*. I'll never forget the experience of arguing against censorship despite the content of a novel.
- **Dr. Berman** - 9th grade honors English. English came alive as we passed the conch shell around the room in our discussion of *Lord of the Flies* or we talked

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about phonies in *Catcher in the Rye*.

Each of these educators had a profound impact on my life both at the time and now as I look back and consider the legacy I want to leave in this profession. After 14 years of teaching, I can only hope that I touch the lives of my students in the same way that each of these adults did mine. Their compassion and excitement for learning permeated what they did and that mattered.

So thank you to the special educators in my life, past and present.

Who are the educators in your life that made a difference and why? Please share

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11 comments Sort by: Oldest to Newest

	<p>William Soderholm Score: 2</p> <p>7:02 AM on May 5, 2016</p> <p>This is very interesting. The problem is we keep getting things added to our list that interfere with all of these positives. The bigger problem is education is promoting these things at an exponential rate all the while providing lip service along the lines of this article.</p> <p>1 reply</p>	
	<p>John Bennett Score: 2</p> <p>9:06 AM on May 5, 2016</p> <p>Though many true educators still refer to themselves as teachers, in my mind, the difference is fairly straightforward: Educators facilitate learning, occasionally teaching when needed; Teachers deliver information following lesson plans, occasionally educating some students.</p> <p>Back when dirt was clear (you know - so long ago, it wasn't even dirty yet...) when I was in school, most were teachers with a few like Ted Strein who were educators. Today, more and more are educators but the change can never be fast enough!!!</p> <p>3 replies</p>	
	<p>DCGMentor Score: 5</p> <p>11:22 AM on May 5, 2016</p> <p>Teachers had this calling long before the term educator was in vogue. Non of the students I have had a lasting impact on since 1970 have ever called me their educator.</p>	

 1 reply



[bradley3](#)

Score: 4

11:50 AM on May 5, 2016

As a teacher, I personally dislike the term "educator" and never refer to myself as such. However, I do full believe that teaching is my calling, not just a job. My dislike for "educator" stems from the fact that it is used to describe everyone involved in education, superintendents, curriculum managers, and the like. Many "educators" do not teach. That is not to say that people in those positions are not necessary to the work that teachers do, but they do not fit the author's or Timmy's definition of "educator".

 1 reply

  
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[leibniz](#)

Score: 4

3:36 PM on May 5, 2016

This "line in the sand" description is ridiculous. My next door neighbor insists that she be addressed as an "educator" and will correct any other title. To imply that some are "educators" and others merely "teachers" would be like distinguishing between "preachers" and "ministers" because you like the style that one of them employs and denigrate the other. Additionally, any teacher also knows that the students perception of the class (and teacher) relies not just on the teacher (educator, instructor, professor, whatever you insist on being called) but also on the content of the class or perhaps more so on the other students in the class. While we're at it, let's decide what other monikers we need to distinguish between. Which is better, doctor or physician? Preacher or minister? Manager or supervisor? Cooperating teacher or instructional coach? Let's not get too full of ourselves here. At the end of the day, do I love my job? Sure. But I also hope that everyone has the feeling that they make a difference in their job, regardless of the profession. To think otherwise could only imply that I'm unappreciative of their service.

  
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[Nancy Flanagan](#)

Score: 4

6:24 PM on May 5, 2016

I once gave a keynote address on the joys of teaching. Immediately following, a woman in a business suit and heels approached me and said "Don't ever call ME a teacher! I'm an...educator." I was taken aback--but it was an opportunity to give the terms some thought.

I think "teacher" is a perfect word--a noun made from an equally perfect although simple verb: teach. Parents teach their children. Children teach each other. The opposite of teach is lean, a seesaw of meaning. The opposite of education is...well maybe what Donald Trump meant when he referred to the "poorly educated."

When people believe they're not teachers any more---they're educators--my "rhetorical excess" radar goes on. I will always be a teacher.

  
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[Yukio](#)

Score: 4

1:07 PM on May 7, 2016

Teacher or educator? Who gives a rip? If respect is missing from the equation it doesn't matter what they call us. How about "Administrator or Classroom Failure?" Now that would be a topic for discussion.

 1 reply

  
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 <p>AEPriester Score: 4</p> <p>3:02 PM on May 8, 2016</p> <p>I can see the distinction you are trying to make, but I have always held the title "teacher" as sacred. Even as a college professor, I thought of myself first as a "teacher," and I prefer the old-fashioned Anglo-Saxon word to "educator" any day. Being a teacher is my calling, and I do more than show up everyday for a job. Society at large may belittle the job and title of teacher, but that doesn't mean we have to accept their assessment of teachers and give ourselves a new name.</p>	   <p>Report Abuse</p>
 <p>bloolight Score: 3</p> <p>11:10 AM on May 9, 2016</p> <p>So I suppose a good teacher is a teacher but a great teacher is an educator? Or is a mediocre educator a teacher? If I teach students I'm a teacher, but if I get students to teach themselves I'm an educator? What if I try to get students to educate themselves and they fail to do so? Am I still an educator, or am I a teacher?</p> <p>I get that you are trying to say something profound here, but I think that you are missing the point. The general public already believes that teaching is a calling rather than a job, which is why they find it so hard to accept that we deserve salaries and benefits. Missionaries don't complain about their lack of good dental coverage, do they?</p> <p>I see myself as a cognition-expert, standing at the boundary between working memory and long-term memory to facilitate the transfer of information. In other words, I'm a teacher.</p>	   <p>Report Abuse</p>
 <p>aradeba1 Score: 2</p> <p>12:28 PM on May 12, 2016</p> <p>On behalf of the teachers you've honored in this blog, "Thank you, my dear!" What a lovely thing to do for those who made such a difference in your life. As for teacher vs educator, I don't care what the official term is as long as I'm working with my wonderful 10th grade English students and we're all learning together. Bravo!</p> <p> 1 reply</p>	   <p>Report Abuse</p>
 <p>dflier Score: 0</p> <p>9:16 AM on May 13, 2016</p> <p>I have a problem with referring to teaching as a calling. Being a teacher is not the same as being a priest or a nun. Claiming that teaching is a calling has too often been used as an excuse to pay teachers next to nothing. I love my job, but I won't do it for free. Calling? No. Profession? I'd like to think so.</p> <p> 1 reply</p>	   <p>Report Abuse</p>
	

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